



International Conference

Preservation Today - Addressing mass digitization and protection

of originals alike

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Federal Archives

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Please register until 5 May 2023 at preservation-conference@bundesarchiv.de

Abstracts

Digitization by Administrative Bodies: Experiences with the NARA strategic plan 2022–26

By Pamela Wright – NARA, U.S.A.

In this presentation, Pamela Wright, Chief Innovation Officer at the U.S. National Archives (NARA), provides an overview spanning the last twenty years of digitization at NARA. The National Archives' Strategic plan for 2022-2026 calls on the agency to provide more than 500 million digital pages in the Catalog by 2026. Wright explores the five approaches to digitization that have increased the digital copies in the Catalog from 150 thousand in 2010 to more than two hundred million today.

Wright notes the negative impacts of COVID, which mainly served to impede digitization efforts across the agency and impacted federal agencies' abilities to comply with electronic records requirements for the transfer of permanent records to NARA.

However, Wright also highlights a silver lining to COVID. She discusses the lessons learned that have accelerated changes in the agency and the U.S. federal government regarding remote work.

Additionally, digitization at NARA has been impacted over the past few years by the agency's focus on equity. In response to the Executive Order on Equity and the publication of the Archivist's Task Force on Racism's report in 2021, a new working group was formed to enact recommendations and requirements. As chair of the reparative Description and Digitization Working Group, Wright provides an inside look into the decision-making processes for prioritization of digitization at NARA.

Mass digitisation supervised by the archives: Advantages and ventures in Finland

By Ville Kajanne – National Archives of Finland

Mass digitization refers to a digitization production of permanently preserved records in a large-scale volume based on a long-term planning. A part of the records is disposed of after digitization, i.e. stored only as digital manifestations, while some remains in analog form as well. In the disposal-oriented digitization the materials can be digitized swiftly but contain a lot of personal data or other information restricted for the time being. Consequently, restrictions based on the data protection regulation must be followed keenly throughout all the processing steps from the transfer to the ultimate disposal of the records. Obviously, most critical phase is the disposal of the analog records where extra control measurements are necessary. After almost four years of disposal-oriented digitization, the disposal will be piloted in the National Archives during this year.

In the recently updated organization of the National Archives, all digitization takes place within the same unit. As of traditional conventions, the digitization of more heterogeneous historical records is decentralized in several locations whereas that of modern ones is centralized in only two premises. Thus, there are differences both in conventions and in challenges. Nevertheless, in accordance with the new digitization strategy of the NAF, the purpose is to develop the digitization to be processed in a uniform process and carried out in centralized production. This, hopefully, results in cost savings, facilitates the monitoring of results and guidance for the operators, improves quality control measurements and provides better tools to create an in-house developed software and solutions infrastructure.

Which records to digitize and how to prioritize them? The question is related to the goals and funding of the work. Should one aim at the largest possible amount of files or simply undertake a survey for the most demanded records in digital format? Sometimes quantitatively large production is the easiest way to a more stable funding which, in turn, enables a more quality-oriented development. For the customers the question is somewhat easier: the content comes ahead of quantity. Even better, if it comes with a more wide-ranged toolbox of means to extract information from the data. Increasing usability is based on text recognition and artificial intelligence-supported, in-house developed and records-related tools. Developing these side by side with running a large-scale production is difficult and preferably requires a separate R&D unit. Usability and quantitative effectiveness aren't necessarily in conflict with one another; with methods of automated processing and error detection based on machine learning the production speed can be enhanced alongside with making records more available in on-line services. The National Archives' new digitization strategy is designed to present better solutions for both of these challenges.

The National Archives of France balancing conservation and digitization

By Flore Hervé – National Archives, France

The National Archives of France keep more than 370 kilometres of definitive archives, from the 7th century to the present day.

The opening of a new building in 2012 was the opportunity to rethink the internal organisation. In this new model, preservation and digitization move forward together within a same department including a restoration workshop, a preventive conservation service, a photography workshop and a team of project managers to lead outsourced scanning operations.

We were quite proud of our virtuous practices towards conservation. For each annual campaign of digitization, the restoration workshop planned a rapid review of the material state of documents to see if they were ready to be scanned or on the contrary, if they had to enter a preparation cycle.

In 2020, in order to prepare the new strategic Plan 2021-2025, we lead an assessment of almost 20 years of digitization. The balance sheet in terms of quantity was not as good as expected: 15 million images produced, 10 million available online, i.e. less than 1% of archives digitized. Amongst the factors affecting the production processes, the document physical preparation was an important slowdown upstream of the production line.

Partnership between conservation and digitization is ambiguous: best friends when the digital access of reproductions involves preventive and curative conservation, they also can be worst enemies when large-scale is at stake. How to preserve documents when they enter a mass digitization programme? How to move from an artisanal *modus operandi* to an industrial process without damages? How to maintain high-quality digitization?

The National Archives of France have implemented different methods. We will overview the first results obtained.

The Preservation Concept of the Federal Archives, Germany

By Jens Niederhut and Kristina John – Federal Archives, Germany

The Federal Archives hold more than 540 linear kilometres of records and over 15 million photographs, posters, maps, etc. The records are mainly made of industrially produced paper. Preserving these documents poses a considerable challenge. In order to meet these challenges according to the newest standards, a new preservation policy has been implemented in 2022.

The policy introduces a concept of preservation levels, to which specific storage conditions and preservation measures are assigned. The main focus is on prevention and optimized storage conditions. The storage of highly prioritized records or fonds („*Kernbestände*”) in a cool environment is a central aspect of this concept.

The shift to mass digitization is essential to the Federal Archives' preservation strategy. A mix of external contracts and the expansion of in-house digitization capacities, high demands on the digitization quality through consistent implementation of international standards as well as innovative technology and efficiently organized processes are prerequisites for achieving these goals.

The restoration and conservation workshops of the Federal Archives are being expanded at the same time in order to assess records scheduled for digitization and to initiate treatment if necessary. Thus, digitization promotes the preservation of the original records not only by limiting access to the physical documents but also by facilitating conservation treatment.

In essence, preserving original records and mass-digitization are complementary strategic fields. The Federal Archives' preservation policy aims at combining both fields in an integrated approach.

Looking back at 20 years of mass digitization in the Netherlands – Lesson learned

By Claire Phan Tan Luu – National Archives of the Netherlands

Digitisation efforts at the National Archives of the Netherlands started as early as in the 80's. They had to scale up significantly in 2013, when the Dutch government decided to have 10% of the governmental archives digitised within 15 years. What began as a project-based task has since developed into a large digitisation department endowed with a steady budget, and responsible for digitising up to 1700 linear metres per year — a rate that is expected to increase. Digitisation has become a vital part of the organisation as it contributes to our statutory task of simultaneously conserving and providing access to the governmental archives.

This presentation reflects on the development of digitisation at the National Archives of the Netherlands, especially on first-line conservation, an integral part of our workflow which has evolved within it. Of the lessons learnt over the years, we chose to share those that provide answers to the following questions: How to balance tight budgets and planning against collection care and safe practices? How to find some flexibility in treatment methods and procedures while striving to comply with guidelines? And finally, how to implement different conservation techniques that can be performed by non-conservators?

The digitisation department's continuing improvements and innovations will also be touched on, to show that its processes became more efficient, while achieving a higher quality in its end products. By doing so, the accessibility and navigability of the digital collections has been optimised, while paving the way for future applications such as handwritten text recognition.

Sustainable Conservation – enabling access, creating expertise, sharing knowledge

By Juergen Vervoort – The National Archives, UK

Sustainability and Conservation have a lot in common and their definitions can be used almost interchangeably: *'Sustainability meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'* (United Nations 1988). Transferring this concept to archival collections, *'Conservation ensures that collections meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'*. Conservation must do so sustainably, and any conservation strategy therefore must focus first on understanding the 'needs of today and the future' and how these might be met. This paper explores how a focus on enabling access, creating expertise, and sharing knowledge might provide solutions to the challenge of caring for ever-growing archival collections in an environment of ever-reducing resources.

Saving the Heritage: Conservation and digitization in times of war – the Ukrainian example

By Johanna Fries Markiewicz – National Archives, Sweden

The aim of the presentation is twofold. First and foremost, it will be a report from a visit to Ukraine in April 2023, meeting professionals from the archival sector and visiting three archives in Kharkiv: the Central State Scientific and Technical Archives of Ukraine, State Archives of Kharkiv region, and the Archival Department of the Kharkiv City Council. Kharkiv has been living under constant shelling since February 24 2022 which has resulted in tremendous destruction. In spite of this the archives have remained open. The presentation examines everyday life securing, digitising and preserving the archives under the constant threat of shelling.

Secondly, there is a constant need for support to the cultural heritage sector in Ukraine; resources are scarce. At the same time cultural heritage and archives have gained importance as weapons to counter Russia's illegitimate historical narrative. The war has thus strengthened the need for Ukraine, aided by the historical records, to define its own place in history as a sovereign nation. In many of the European archives sources to Ukrainian history are hidden. Apart from supporting Ukraine with necessary resources, archives can work on making records connected to Ukraine accessible. Since the war started, the National Archives of Sweden in collaboration with researchers, has been digitising and publishing records connected to Ukraine online.

Modelling Preservation Options for Paper Collections: Best practice

By Cristina Duran Casablanca – Amsterdam City Archives

During the past few years we developed two mathematical models to simulate life expectancy of paper collections depending on preservation measures taken. The first model was built to compare and evaluate different preservation scenarios, such as deacidifying part of the collections or a small change in storage environmental conditions. The goal of the second model was to investigate how requests from the reading room will eventually decrease as result of collections becoming digitally available. Five years on it is time to reflect on both models. Have they lived up to their purpose as tools to support well-informed decision making? In the first part of the presentation we will talk on to what extent the information provided by the models has been implemented in preservation and digitisation strategies of the Amsterdam City Archives, from the environmental conditions in the new repository facilities to the selection of collections for digitisation. In the second part, we will look at the assumptions underlying the model regarding the use of collections. By comparing output of the model with reading room usage history over the last five years, we will examine further the validity of the model and whether it needs revision after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Reading Room@home—Swiss Perspectives on Mass Digitization on Demand

By Stefan Nellen and Marine van den Driessche – Swiss Federal Archives

Customers can conveniently access and process records of the Swiss Federal Archives at any time and from anywhere, as long as they have internet connectivity. Along this strategic vision, we have implemented the "digital first" approach to information access. The prerequisite for this policy was the development of an online access system.

On the one hand, it consists of a virtual reading room in which our customers can search for, find, order, and consult all their documents. On the other hand, this online access entails a digitization operation because the majority of our records are not archived in digital but analog form. As the digitization of 70 linear kilometers of documents was neither affordable nor feasible in due time, we decided to digitize "on demand": If we digitize documents our customers order, we appear to be a completely digital archive. Although not all of our documents are available in digitized form, this approach allows us to preserve those physical documents that are actually requested while increasing the possibilities of their analysis.

Since the launch of our on-demand system in November 2019, requests for digitized records have exceeded our expectations, prompting us to expand our digitization operations. Our goal is to digitize all ordered documents within a reasonable time frame. Our presentation showcases our "on

demand" digitization approach, including the political, practical, and technological challenges and opportunities it presents, and the impact it has on the archives as a whole.